

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

The present invention is directed to a method of inviting communication, and more particularly, to a method for directing a targeted message to another individual using a sign and inviting the person to engage in subsequent communication on-line via a computer network.

Discussion of the Related Art

Meeting new people to begin a relationship can be a stressful and sometimes awkward undertaking, which all too often ends in disappointment. Many times, people will see someone they find attractive at a social gathering and, while they hope to get to know the person, they might be somewhat reluctant to approach the other person to begin a conversation. More commonly, a person will see someone they find attractive while they are driving in their car. They might smile at the other person as a gesture of affection, when given an opportunity, for instance while stopped at a traffic light. And, while the other person may return the smile, when the traffic light turns green the two will most likely drive away never to meet again.

The Internet has presented a whole new opportunity for people to socialize without the pressures of face-to-face introductions. It is becoming quite common for two individuals to initially "meet" on the Internet in a chat room or other social forums. Use of a computer to communicate enables each person to express their

thoughts without the pressures of public introduction where people are generally more nervous and find it difficult to express their thoughts and feelings to the other person. However, when an initial meeting of two people takes place on the Internet, they each begin to create an image of the other person in their mind, without having actually seen the other person. If the two eventually arrange to meet or exchange photos, typically the appearance of the other person is far different from the image created in one's mind. And, while each person may initially try to hide their feelings of disappointment, in many cases they quickly break off the relationship.

In view of the foregoing problems associated with meeting new people to begin a relationship, there remains a need for a convenient and less awkward method for enabling two people to become acquainted with each other. More particularly, there remains a need to enable a person to conveniently invite another person to communicate on-line, via a computer network such as the Internet, so as to avoid the pressure and awkwardness of a face-to-face introduction.

Brief Description of the Drawings

For a fuller understanding of the nature of the present invention, reference should be made to the following detailed description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1 is an elevational view showing a sign mounted to a window of a vehicle for directing a message containing the vehicle occupant's e-mail address or

screen name at another person in accordance with the method of the present invention;

Figure 2 is a side elevation, in cross section, showing a sign for displaying a message in accordance with the present invention; and

Figure 3 is a circuit diagram of the sign of figure 2.

Like reference numerals refer to like parts throughout the several views of the drawings.

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiments

A method of connecting two individuals for social interaction on the Internet uses a sign 10 attached to a window 12 of a vehicle 14 occupied by one of the individuals 16. When the vehicle occupant 16 sees another person, either a pedestrian or in another vehicle, the vehicle occupant 16 illuminates the sign 10 to direct a message 20 at the other individual. The message 20 contains the vehicle occupant's e-mail address or screen name 22 with an invitation 24 to communicate on-line via a computer network such as the Internet. The sign 10 is powered by either the vehicle's electric power supply system (i.e., alternator and battery) or by a battery power source stored in the sign. The vehicle occupant 16 activates the sign to illuminate the message, by either plugging a cord into the vehicle's cigarette lighter, a 12 volt connection, or with the use of a switch located within reach of the driver of the vehicle.

In a preferred embodiment, the sign 10 is provided in the form of a portable box unit 30 which attaches to the vehicle window 12 with the use of suction cups 32. A cord 34 for powering a light source 36 within the box extends to a plug 38 for connection with the vehicle's cigarette lighter to thereby provide power to the light source. Alternately, a switch 39 may be installed within easy reach of the vehicle occupant for controlling activation of the light source 36 and illumination of the message on the sign. A first panel 40 contains the message 20 and is customized for each particular user. Specifically, the first panel 40 includes the message 20 with the user's e-mail address or screen name 22 and an appropriate invitation 24. A second translucent panel 42 overlies the first panel 40 so that the message on the first panel is not visible when the sign is not illuminated (i.e., when the light source is not activated). In this manner, the message on the sign is not viewable by the general public when the sign is not illuminated. This allows the user (i.e., vehicle occupant) 16 to direct the message to a targeted individual so that the particular targeted individual will realize that the message is being directed to their attention. In the event the person receiving the message decides that he/she is not attracted to the vehicle occupant 16, or just does not want to engage in any communication with the vehicle occupant, then that person can simply ignore the message and avoid making subsequent on-line contact with the vehicle occupant 16. On the other hand, if the recipient of the message decides that they may want to explore the possibility of a relationship with the vehicle occupant 16, then they can safely contact the vehicle occupant 16 on-line, at the vehicle occupant's e-mail address or

screen name. This allows both individuals to get to know each other by electronic communication, via the Internet, prior to proceeding any further with a personal relationship.

While the instant invention has been shown and described in accordance with a practical and preferred embodiment thereof, it is recognized that departures from the instant disclosure are contemplated within the spirit and scope of the invention, which should not be limited except as defined in the following claims.

404524-1-10301